



Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism

Richard Dellamora

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Beginning with Tennyson's *In Memoriam* and continuing by way of Hopkins and Swinburne to the novels of Oscar Wilde and Thomas Hardy, Richard Dellamora draws on journals, letters, censored texts, and pornography to examine the cultural construction of masculinity in Victorian literature.

Central to the struggle over the meaning of masculine desire was the institutional politics of Oxford University, where Benjamin Jowett, Matthew Arnold, John Ruskin, and Walter Pater were principal players. As a young man in the 1860s, Pater, the art historian, essayist, and novelist, theorized a place for desire between men in cultural formation and critique. Later, in a climate of growing intolerance, he continued to affirm male-male desire but with increasing attention to the social functions of homophobia. Dellamora shows that discontent with conventional gender roles animated efforts to reimagine the possibilities of masculine existence.

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